

Liberty Historic District
Route 2, Cle Elum
Liberty
Kittitas County
Washington

HABS No. WA-163

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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

OFFICE NAME: HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SITE NAME: Liberty Historic District/Townsite
LOCATION: Townsite of Liberty, Kittitas
County, State of Washington

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The National Register townsite of Liberty, Washington, originally named Meaghersville (pronounced Mearsville) is located in the center of the Swauk Mining District. The district is nestled in the low mountainous country near where the rugged Mt. Stewart Range of the Wenatchee Mountains from the east blend with Washington's backbone, the North-South Cascade Mountain Range. Liberty is situated 26 miles northwest of Ellensburg, via Interstate 90, Wenatchee exit, or from Cle Elum where I-90 meets State Highway 97 and driving twelve miles east, paralleling Swauk Creek for approximately eight of the twelve miles.

The southward-flowing Swauk Creek, a tributary of the Yakima River, enters the Yakima fourteen miles above Ellensburg. The flow fluctuations of Swauk Creek range from raging spring floods to quiet flowing waters six feet wide, easily crossed on stones above the water level in the dry summer and fall seasons.

The principal gold-bearing tributaries of the Swauk Mining District are from north to south; Baker Creek, Mill Gulch, and Deer Gulch. Williams Creek was, and still is, the richest. Liberty, two miles above the confluence of the Swauk and Williams Creeks, marks the place where the Bonanza tributaries enter. The Boulder Creek tributary from the Flag Mountain area to the south, and Lion and Cougar Gulches from the north, (early maps show the two latter names as Lyons and Kruger) enter Williams Creek flanking the Liberty townsite.

UTM COORDINATES: U.S.G.S. Maps: Liberty and Thorp Quadrangle.
UTM Coordinates 676630 5235800.

PRESENT OWNER: Multiple--See individual index cards.

PRESENT OCCUPANTS: Multiple--See individual index cards.

PRESENT USE: Multiple--See individual index cards.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Walla Walla Union, October 18, 1873, reported a gold strike in the mountains north of the Kittitas Valley. The Union continued to report the progress of the 40 or more men wintering at the discovery area. This fall date establishes the beginning of continuous habitation of the Swauk Mining District which encompasses Swauk Creek, Williams Creek and tributaries.

The present townsite of Liberty was originally known as Williams Creek, becoming Meaghersville in 1897 and finally Liberty in 1912 at the advent of the area post offices' consolidation at the Meaghersville site.

Early information of the area, claims, and mining activities, are sketchy due to subsequent fires in Yakima and Ellensburg which destroyed many important records.

In 1891, two years after Washington became a state, John A. Shoudy (Ellensburg's founder) bought a claim from "Nez" Jensen and laid out a townsite, surveying lots for homes and businesses. Ground was even set aside for a school and a community hall. The miners built the community hall in 1892 and the school in 1895. Somehow, J. K. Morrell acquired this townsite, but by 1897 T. F. Meagher had jumped the townsite claim and won his case in court, renaming the townsite Meaghersville. By 1907 there were numerous cabins built on the mining claims in the Swauk area when the Wenatchee National Forest which surrounds Liberty was created.

Regardless of the community's name it has been the economic center of the Swauk Mining District; boasting stores, hotels, a barbershop, taxidermy, gas station, a base for logging companies, a railroad spur into the Northern Pacific main line at the Yakima River, a sawmill, community hall and a doctor. The Liberty school was open from 1895 until 1939 when it was consolidated with the Cle Elum District. From 1895 to 1960, the citizens voted at their own polling place and from 1910 to 1951 the town had a U.S. Post Office. In its prime the community had about 200 residents.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION: See individual index cards.

A. Physical History: See individual index cards.

B. Historical Content:

The beginning of Liberty started with the discovery of a sizable quantity of gold on Swauk Creek in the fall of 1873. Prior to that time prospectors hadn't found enough gold to warrant the establishment of a camp site. D. J. Schnebly correspondent for the Walla Walla Union reported on October 18, 1873, from Yakima County, Kittitas Valley, Washington Territory:

"I write you in a hurry to let you know that important gold discoveries have been made in the mountains north of the Kittitas on a small creek called the Swauk. Ten men made the discovery some three weeks since. They kept the thing secret until a few days ago. An Indian messenger was dispatched to Mr. Bull for him to come forth--that they had struck a good thing. Mr. Bull got the news in the evening, and started in two hours, it was dark when he left. Persons left at all hours of the night. Seventy persons were on the ground in less than two days.

The specimens I saw were coarse, weighing respectively 1/2 ounce, \$5.20 and \$4.37. I saw about \$70 of the precious stuff at the store of Shoudy and Dennis. There were 2,000 men here in less than two days. The news has gone over to Seattle several days since. Mr. Stubbs, who is at work in the interest of the Walla Walla and Seattle Railroad, left a few days ago. No person has the time to talk railroad now.

I do not want to be understood that the gold is all coarse like the nuggets I have mentioned, but some of the chunks are clear gold, and some have quartz in them, but these weighed in my presence are almost entirely free from quartz. Everybody has left--all my neighbors have gone, married and unmarried.

There is no doubt of the existance of gold in paying quantities. The discovery party sent down some \$300. Gold is coming down and goods are going up--in a double sense.

I write you this at two o'clock in the morning. Will leave in a couple of hours. All work has ceased in a measure. The all absorbing topic is the new mines which are distant only about twenty-five miles--good trail all the way. A good wagon road can soon be made into the mines. The stream upon which they are situated enters from the west of the valley, and joins the Yakima some twelve miles above here.

I have never witnessed a greater excitement. The House of Shoudy have claims. One of the latter has been up and returned and the other left immediately on his return.

You can tell your friend that I think the mines will pay, but there cannot be much done before next spring. The snow falls pretty deep there, and the nights, the boys say, are cool now. An ounce piece has been taken out. I did not see it, but persons who did tell me so. I have seen several men who have been up and returned. They have twenty days to represent their claims in--the discovery party passed their laws and got everything set before they proclaimed the news. Joe Davis and two of the Goodwin boys are of the number.

I am of the opinion that this will lead to a thorough prospecting of adjacent country, and will lead to more important discoveries in the Cascade Mountains. The Swauk affords plenty of water for mining purposes. I did not learn how deep it is to the bedrock, but my impression is the diggings are shallow and easily worked. It is my firm belief that it is a good camp. I will know more about it in a few days. You will hear from me again. D.J.S."

This newspaper account begins the tale of two townsites, old Liberty on Swauk Creek and Meaghersville on Williams Creek, later to become the present National Register townsite of Liberty.

The chaos of the gold rush and the need to keep order in the discovery area forced the prospectors to organize the Swauk Creek Mining District with D. Y. Borden as the recorder. The men agreed that the claims should be 200 feet long and from rimrock to rimrock.

With the best claims taken on Swauk Creek, the other tributaries were the next focus of the gold struck prospectors. Austin Mires' (Ellensburg's first mayor and later a representative to the State Legislature) recollection of the Williams Creek discovery (contained in a tribute to William J. Taylor, one of the participants in the Swauk rush) was later published in the Ellensburg Capital.

"In 1873 one day he was working on the Smith ranch putting a cover on the cookhouse when Fint McDonald came riding along and called to Bill telling him some parties had discovered gold up in Swauk. Taylor shouted down to Jeff Smith's squaw to hi-ak muk-a-muk, and sent an Indian boy to corral the horses. They were not long in getting ready to start and as soon as they had eaten some dinner they saddled their horses and with some bedding and grub tied to their saddles they hurried away up across the unfenced country, through Green Canyon and down First Creek to its confluence with the Swauk. Here they met some other parties from Yakima hurrying to the new discovery. It was agreed among them all that the one who

could beat to the mines should have the right to the first location, and the race was on. Bill's horse out ran all the others. When they arrived at the mouth of Williams Creek it was dark and they all there agreed to put the names of the locators on slips of paper and fasten them to stakes and then two of the men would step off 100 feet and there set one of the stakes and then another 100 feet and set another, continuing thus on up the creek until all the stakes were set. Such stake would establish a claim 100 feet long from rim to rim on the gulch for the one whose name was on the stake. Taylor's claim was located on Williams Creek at the mouth of Lyon's Gulch. He did some work on his claim that fall but never got to bedrock and finally abandoned it. This same ground was afterwards worked by Thomas F. Neaghers and many thousands of dollars were taken out. People kept coming into the Swauk all that night, among others Mose Bellman, Ed Whitson, Charles B. Reed, some of the Splawns and many more of the old pioneers."²

Following the first flash of the gold strikes, news items from the mining district were scarce until 1887 when the Kittitas Standard, in an attempt to promote the area, published a series of letters from Swauk miners. "They called it a 'sadly neglected camp.' It is evident from the letters that many prominent Ellensburg men were active in developing the area. Dexter Shoudy, son of the early founder of Ellensburg, had already begun hydraulic work."³

One of the reasons for quietness on the mining front was an influx of Chinese miners. Because of their seemingly strange and secretive ways they were excluded from the existing mining camps. By 1890 the Chinese had left the Swauk.

With the steady support from local investors and promoters, gold continued to be extracted from the bedrock on Swauk Creek. In 1889 Mr. Carson built a store at the mouth of Williams Creek. Torkell Tweet struck a sizable quantity of gold on his Swauk Creek claim in 1891 and had constructed a large water powered arrastra on his claim.

Numerous letters began to be submitted to the Ellensburg Capital

and Register in the 1890's addressing the difficulties of mining life as well as reflecting the character of the developing mining communities on the Swauk. The idea that the mining camps were filled with shiftless single men is soon dispelled by this newspaper account in 1892:

Ellensburg Capital: "It seems that a resident of the camp, with business interests and a devoted wife and family, has been acting in rather an unbecoming manner with a woman bearing another man's name. A few days ago they left camp and it was soon learned they were enjoying each other's company here (Ellensburg). The injured wife learned of her husband's perfidy and as he had left her without any money, the kind-hearted miners quickly made her a purse sufficient to enable her to reach friends and she left the place with her little ones The miners say they have no use for this kind and they intend to make an example of him if he returns."

The following excerpts from You're at Liberty Here by Jesse Jordan provides hi-lights of the early years of the Swauk Mining District:

In 1891 John A. Shoudy, prominent Ellensburg pioneer, buys "Nez" Jensen's place on Swauk Creek near where Williams Creek empties into it and began to lay out a town and also to set up a store. Early in the Spring of 1892 the miners decided to build a public hall, it was to be thirty feet by sixty feet and was to be constructed on the corner of Main and Swauk Avenue. With donated materials and labor the building was opened July 4, 1892. Scott Darling opened a store but because of shady management the store quickly changed hands. The Liberty Post Office was established in 1892 and Gus Nelson appointed the first Post Master. Again most of the development was happening at the confluence of Williams Creek and Swauk Creek. A stage line was established from Ellensburg to Liberty by W. A. Ford. In 1893 Frank Lauderdale purchased Shoudy's store and established a boarding house under his wife's supervision.

By 1895 the interest in mining was swinging away from Swauk Creek and on to Williams Creek where both Meagher and Bigney had their claims. As a consequence a building boom developed on Williams Creek. The little

community formed there was at first called New Yakima and soon Meaghersville, but when most of the people gradually transferred from the Old Liberty and moved their buildings with them, the Post Office came also in 1916 and Meaghersville became New Liberty. . . . Newspaper reports become confusing after 1895 as it is difficult to tell which of the communities are being spoken of in reference to Liberty."⁵

Also in 1895 a school house was built in Meaghersville, another reflection of the composition of the community. In 1896 prosperity enveloped the camp--a barbershop and jewelry store, a hotel and a restaurant opened in Meaghersville. The end of the 1890's was marked by a consolidation of small mining claims into the holdings of larger companies.

1900 dawns and telephone lines are strung into the Swauk in the fall of 1901. The National Forest Service which surrounds Liberty was created in 1907. Lands that had had no current mining claims or were unpatented were considered to be public lands and under the jurisdiction of this newly created governmental department.

Conflict, dissension, controversy and uncertainty describes the mining camp. Mining claims had changed hands frequently and abandoned claims had been fair diggings for any new prospector. These differences and conflicts had been characteristically settled by neighbors. The residents who had had local control were suddenly not sure of the status of their claims and land holdings. Any use other than mining was considered government trespass. A Forest Service report, filed in 1908 addresses the conflict of residents farming on "wormout" mining claims and the miners' resentment of agricultural classification rather than mineral. M. L. Erickson's recommendations were: "In order to avoid issuing many special use permits, which will undoubtedly cause dissension among miners, it may be best to eliminate under the townsite law, the townsite of Meaghersville."⁶

In 1916 the Livingston brothers, who had run the Liberty Post Office and store at old Liberty on the Snake, went out of business. They were the remaining holdouts at the old Liberty site. The post office building was then moved up the creek to Meaghersville and the townsite officially named Liberty.

During the twenties the type of mining investment and the intensity of the engineering and technology had accelerated greatly. The old mining code of ethics was again challenged and residents of Liberty were soon caught in a legal battle with the Salem Mining Company. The citizens banded together and filed an appeal with the Federal Court of Appeals in Portland, Oregon. The Liberty residents won their appeal and the mining company was denied mining rights within the townsite.

In 1932 Liberty resident, Ollie Jordin, hit pay dirt. The strike yielded between 70 to 80,000 dollars. His brother, Clarence, also struck a vein of gold on his Ace of Diamonds-Flag Mountain claim. This strike yielded between 35 and 40,000 dollars.⁷ During the 1960's - 70's - 80's Harry and Virgil Hiner's dredging operation, Gold Placers, Inc., located south of the townsite has recovered enough gold to continue extensive open pit mining.

Land use conflicts among miners, townsite residents and the U.S. Forest Service was the impetus to force the Liberty residents to petition to have the townsite included on the National Register of Historic Places. The residents have continued to push for legislation to allow a land sale to the residents barring a public auction. Consequently, in 1981 with legislation passed, the Forest Service is transferring said titles in the Liberty townsite to Kittitas County and the Liberty residents are paying the land assessments to the county to finally obtain clear titles.

Specific areas of significance not addressed directly in the historical context are. First, the varieties of gold (wire gold, gold dust, gold nuggets, and quartz gold) discovered in the Swauk area. The geological diversity of the area requires a variety of mining techniques: placer, pocket, hydraulic, and hard rock mining methods are facilitated to extract the goldbearing ore, sometimes used side by side. Although not unique, this is one of the few areas in the state or in the country where such diversity is found. Gold mining has continued to be the main occupation for many of the residents and their single source of economic independence.

Secondly, the miners who have come to prospect here over the years were not single or shiftless men. They brought their families, a standard of ethics, ideals and morals, and have continued to maintain a quality of life that is uniquely rural and "Liberty". The citizens have banded together for recreation and comradery through disasters, and for common survival. They have started a school, businesses, services, and a style of local government that has uniquely met the needs of their community. Each of these industrious, rugged individuals have felt the need to join together when their lifestyle has been threatened during the last one-hundred plus years. This lifestyle has spartan elements and a long established ethic of re-use. Even the cabins built in Liberty represent that ethic of re-use. They are assembled from various construction types and methods from locally available materials.

"It can be stated unequivocally that our great Nation draws much of its strength from the sound traditions and culture which have been built on our own soil. We could view the future with greater equanimity if we knew that it would be built in harmony with the nobility and greatness of the past."⁹

In conclusion, the life of the Swauk gold camp can be divided into seven areas of activity:

- A. Discovery and initial rush: 1873.
- B. Moderate activity: 1874-1890.
- C. Boom: 1891-1905.
- D. Lag: 1906-1920.
- E. Period of the dredges: 1920-1929.
- F. Depression boom: 1932-1939.
- G. Lag: 1940-.⁸

Gold has continued to be extracted from the mines around Liberty since the 1940's but the dollar amount is unavailable. It is certain that gold will continue to be extracted from the Swauk Mining District and that the Liberty residents will continue to be involved in the mining process.

LIBERTY

HISTORIC DISTRICT TOWNSITE

1891-1981
WASHINGTON

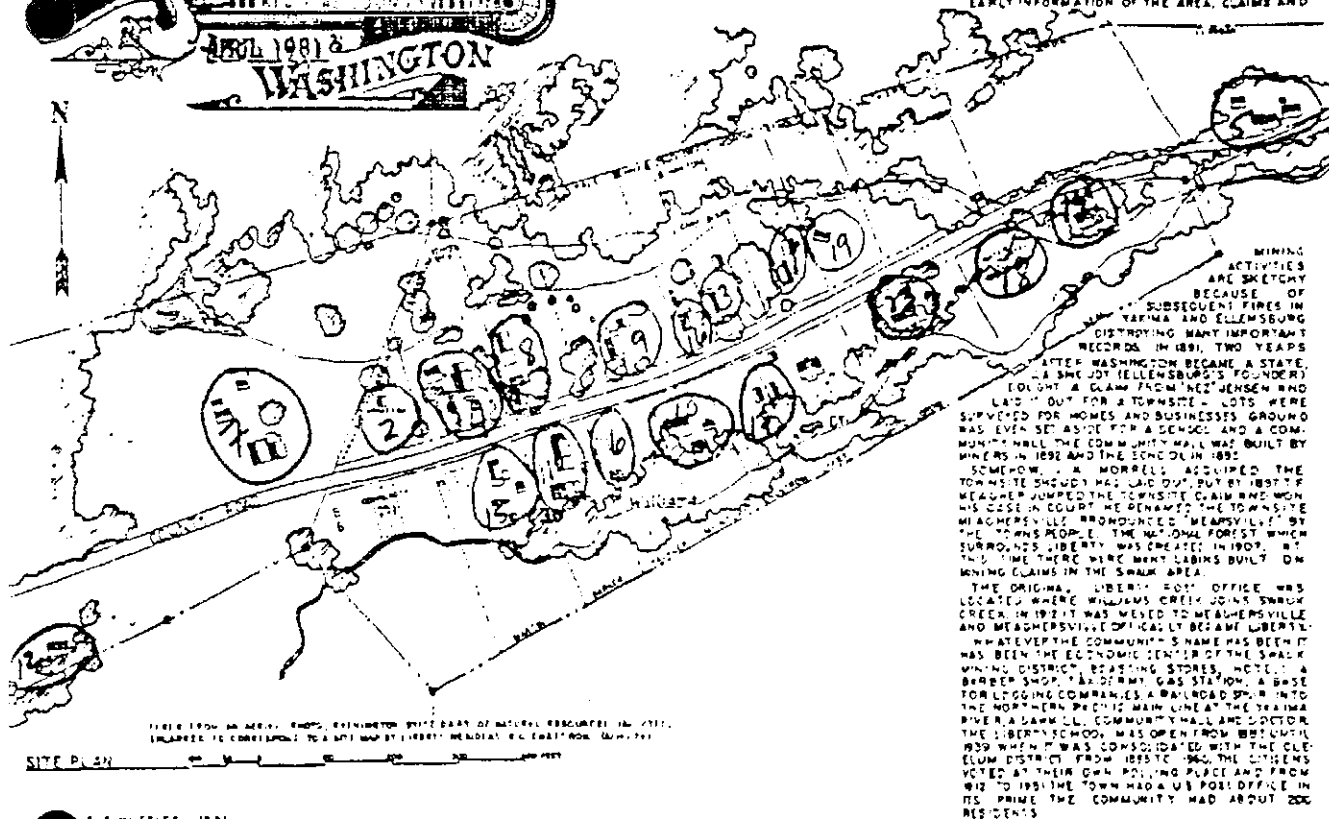
THE WALLAMALLA UNION ON OCTOBER 18, 1873 REPORTED THAT A GOLD STRIKE HAD BEEN MADE IN THE MOUNTAINS NORTH OF THE NITITAS VALLEY. THE UNION CONTINUED TO REPORT THE PROGRESS OF THE AD MIN. WHO WERE MINING IN THE DISCOVERY AREA. CONTINUOUS MINING OF THE SWAUR MINING DISTRICT DATES FROM THIS TIME. THE DISTRICT ENCOMPASSES SWAUR CREEK, WILLIAMS CREEK AND ALL THEIR TRIBUTARIES.

THE PRESENT TOWNSITE OF LIBERTY WAS ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS WILLIAMS CREEK. LATER ON IT BECAME MEAGHERSVILLE. UNTIL 1912, WHEN THE AREA POST OFFICES WERE CONSOLIDATED. EARLY INFORMATION OF THE AREA, CLAIMS AND

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MINING ACTIVITIES ARE SKETCHY BECAUSE OF SUBSEQUENT TIMES IN YAKIMA AND ELLENSBURG DESTROYING MANY IMPORTANT RECORDS. IN 1891, TWO YEARS AFTER WASHINGTON BECAME A STATE, A SHEPHERD (ELLENSBURG'S FOUNDER) BOUGHT A CLAIM FROM NICK JENSEN AND LAID OUT FOR A TOWNSITE. LOTS WERE SURVEYED FOR HOMES AND BUSINESSES. GROUND WAS EVEN SET ASIDE FOR A SCHOOL AND A COMMUNITY HALL. THE COMMUNITY HALL WAS BUILT BY MINERS IN 1892 AND THE SCHOOL IN 1893.

SOMEHOW, A MORRELL ASSIGNED THE TOWNSITE SHOULD HAVE LAD OUT, BUT BY 1897 MEAGHER JUMPED THE TOWNSITE CLAIM AND WON HIS CASE IN COURT. HE RENAMED THE TOWNSITE MEAGHERSVILLE. MEAGHERSVILLE, RENOWNED "MEAGHERSVILLE" BY THE TOWNSPEOPLE. THE NATIONAL FOREST WHICH SURROUNDS LIBERTY WAS CREATED IN 1907. AT THIS TIME THERE WERE MANY LOTS BUILT ON MINING CLAIMS IN THE SWAUR AREA.

THE ORIGINAL LIBERTY POST OFFICE WAS LOCATED WHERE WILLIAMS CREEK JOINS SWAUR CREEK. IN 1912 IT WAS MOVED TO MEAGHERSVILLE AND MEAGHERSVILLE OFFICIALLY BECAME LIBERTY. WHATEVER THE COMMUNITY'S NAME HAS BEEN IT HAS BEEN THE ECONOMIC CENTER OF THE SWAUR MINING DISTRICT. BOASTING STORES, HOTELS, A BARBER SHOP, TAXIDERM, GAS STATION, A BASE FOR LOGGING COMPANIES, A RAILROAD SPUR INTO THE NORTHERN PACIFIC MAIN LINE AT THE YAKIMA RIVER A SERRILL COMMUNITY HALL AND SCHOOL. THE LIBERTY SCHOOL WAS OPEN FROM 1891 UNTIL 1939 WHEN IT WAS CONSOLIDATED WITH THE CLELUM DISTRICT. FROM 1893 TO 1960, THE CITIZENS VOTED AT THEIR OWN POLLING PLACE AND FROM 1912 TO 1931 THE TOWN HAD A US POST OFFICE. IN ITS PRIME THE COMMUNITY HAD ABOUT 200 RESIDENTS.

LIBERTY HISTORIC DISTRICT TOWNSITE

STATE ROUTE 87, 1/2 MILE NORTHEAST ON LIBERTY ROAD, LIBERTY, SITTING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

1. Billy Anderson Cabin
2. Arrastra
3. Assay Office
4. Caldwell Store and Liberty Post Office
5. William Elliot Cabin and Outbuilding
6. Calhoun's Butcher Shop (destroyed 1979)
7. Gold Placer's Inc.
8. Ed Guse Cabin
9. Amos Jordin Cabin
10. Ben Killson Cabin
11. Livery Stable and Barker Cabin
12. Thomas Meagher's Cabin
13. Meagher's Hotel and Boarding House
14. Joe Neal Cabin
15. Gus Siegel Cabin
16. Eloise Stine
17. Taxidermy Shop
18. Water-Powered Ore Mill
19. A.P. York Cabin

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Walla Walla Union, October 18, 1873.
- ²Glauret, Earl T. and Merle H. Kunz, Wittitas Frontiersman. Ellensburg Public Library, Ellensburg, Washington, 1976, page 186.
- ³Jordan, Jossee, You're at Liberty Here, Mines and Miners of the Swauk, Franklin Press, Inc., Yakima, Washington, 1967, page 27.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, pages 31-32.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, pages 33-41.
- ⁶Erickson, M. L., Inspector, Forest Service Report, 1908, Section V Claims.
- ⁷National Register Nomination - Liberty Historic District, February 10, 1972.
- ⁸Jordan, *op.cit.*, page 67.
- ⁹U.S. Senate Committee on Interior Insular Affairs, Preservation of Historic Properties, Report No. 1363, 89th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1966.

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This Report prepared by David Wheeler, Wenatchee National Forest
Consultant, July 1981.

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Part IV. Project Information

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